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ABSTRACT

In this speech, a plea is made to return content to the social studies. Content is seen as essential to cognitive and affective learning. Although the author feels that the introduction of behavioral objectives is a significant development of the various social studies projects, it is meaningless unless it is related to content. Clearly stated goals which involve the ultimate perception of concepts, generalizations, and models are dependent ultimately upon the selection and use of content. An example is given in which entering college students were asked how much content about Latin American was offered in their social studies classrooms -- the answer being very little. However, these same students are expected to understand minority problems in the United States. True understanding would necessarily reflect content on the political, social, and cultural aspects of Latin America. (SJM)

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RETURN TO THE SOCIAL STUDIES

"The Man of La Mancha" comes to mind as this session opens tonight...Once again we dream the "impossible dream"-things will change this time. There seems to be an indestructible hope that one's words will really move the teaching of Social Studies forward. This session is entitled "Content, Methodology and Integration in the Social Studies"; it might more appropriately be re-named the "Social Studies: Myths and Reality". The November issue of Social Education carried an "In-depth Evaluation of Social Studies Curricular Projects, Programs and Materials." To what purpose? And that question is not asked cynically but realistically. To what purpose? Those who have introduced the "new" Social Studies, the innovative fresh ideas of curriculum instruction, the formulation of materials for every program,-these leaders have made a genuine contribution to the field of Social Studies. Throughout the United States, do we have a "silent majority" of Social Studies teachers who are really waiting it out,-people to whom the new curriculum projects are simply overwhelming-and who are doing exactly what they have done for the last decade? This is not a healthy development but there is good reason to believe that it is true.(1)

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How did we reach this present situation,-with an entire issue of Social Education devoted to an evaluation of curriculum projects and materials and yet the continued rating by students of Social Studies as an area of the lowest preference? And an evaluation of a similar nature by faculty not in the department of Social Studies?

It has now become a cliché to speak of the rapidity of change and its pervasiveness in our society where so much of business enterprise is involved in the production of items unknown to us twenty-five years ago. The theme of this convention is based upon the revolutionary alteration which we are experiencing. As the annual meetings of NCSS indicate, the last thirty years

have marked an increasing dissatisfaction with the programs in Social Studies.

The dictum of Abraham Lincoln has been accepted with acclaim, "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. Let us disenthrall ourselves." As we existed through a second world conflagration, war in Korea, a Cold War, conflict in southeast Asia and continuing inflation, educators became convinced that the school's program in Social Studies was simply not fulfulling the need to have enlightened citizens. We North Americans have an almost naive faith that the schools will alter things and become an agent of social change. And thus the accelerated effort to develop Social Studies curriculas as the issues of Social Education indicate. We looked back upon that "quiet past" and concluded that former programs in Social Studies were facts, facts and more facts. We have all listened to countless educators who vented their frustrations by inveighing against rote teaching, the accumulation of information, the uninspired lectures, -- and all of this was patently inadequate as Lincoln had said a century ago! The great war cry came to be "Get rid of the traditional content, procedures and methods, - dump it out and latch on the new,- make the classroom relevant..." Those two words, traditional and relevant became the slogans of Social Studies educators. There was the righteousness of facile passion about the evils of the past and the glories of the new. I would suggest that we drop these two words completely if we propose to move forward. "Tradition" is the source of strength, a reminder of continuity; traditional ruts are deadly, stultifying, destructive of movement. "Relevant" can mean significant and relational or merely time-serving. We are now in the process of making one a bad word and the other a good word, - and such simplification obscures the dilemmas we face.

Exactly forty years ago, Charles A. Beard in his famous Charter for the Social Sciences emphasized the absurdity of an exaggerated rigidity of boundaries among the Social Sciences and History. As a consequence of his interest, he became practically the godfather of the National Council for the Social Studies. But four decades later, the whole issue of integration and synthesis has not been solved. What does integration of History and the Social Sciences involve? Knowledge, attitudes, values, concepts, generalizations, information? Methods of teaching? Strategies of learning? Goals and objectives? All are inextricably related. It becomes clear that the teacher of Social Sciences must bear a resemblance to the Renaissance Man, - not because he or she is the master of all surveyable knowledge but because of breadth of interests. The teacher cannot be master of all fields but must be acquainted with many and disposed to make inquiry into any that serve investigation. In other words, the teacher must be conversant enough to fire the imagination of students,- to push them ahead into places where the teacher cannot go,- not because of lack of interest but because of lack of time. In other words, self-propelled learning about man and society has become the outstanding need of an age of "future shock",- to be able to analyze, judge, discriminate and decide.

The greatest single contribution that the various Social Studies projects have given to the profession is an insistence that clear delineation of goals is the basic essential for all curriculum construction, teaching and learning. Goals clearly defined determine the process of learning which includes the teacher response to content and the motivation of the learner. In the construction of viable goals for learning, and the process of achieving them, there is probably no teacher of Social Studies wedded to an exclusive emphasis upon the military, political and geographical facts that have been so roundly condemned. In the

place of the nineteenth and early twentieth century emphasis upon information has come the emphasis of the last decade upon concepts, generalizations and values as the goals of both cognitive and affective learning in the Social Studies.

Every curriculum project worthy of the name from those of the most prestigious universities to the average state department of education has drawn up lists of concepts and generalizations to be realized in the Social Studies classroom. "They guarantee nothing short of Utopian harmony, social order and financial and cultural success." (2) as one author described it. Probably only the classroom teacher harbors any doubts or disillusionment about their achievement. On the other hand, our inadequate grasp of the importance of the disposition to learn is the tragic flaw in our educational system (3) and thus the failure to realize that concepts may be beyond the capacity of the student or a matter of indifference to him. The cumulative process involved in concept development requires an understanding base in knowledge; the process of generalization demands a mastery of succeeding skills. Let me be explicit about this, and give an example of vital concern to American citizens... In the College Entrance Examination Board questionnaire for students taking the examination in 1969, the students were asked to indicate to what degree Latin America was taught in their schools and how much time was given to it. On a national level, the answer was "very little". Yet I have seen no list of concepts to be understood or developed which did not contain some clear reference to understanding of minority groups, the power to relate to developing nations, the process of interrelatedness. If the content of current secondary school courses contains little mention of Latin America or the Spanish-speaking, then how can these concepts have any genuine significance?

Jerome Bruner, the apostle of structure of knowledge, has given five goals to be achieved:

1) To give our pupils respect for and confidence in the power of their own minds;

2) To give them respect, moreover, for the powers of thought concerning the human condition, man's plight and his social life;

3) To provide them with a set of workable models to make it simpler to analyze the nature of the social world in which they live and the condition in which man finds himself;

4) To impart a sense of respect for the capacities and the plight of man as a species, for his origins, his potential and for his humanity;

5) To leave the students with the sense of the unfinished business of man's evolution. (4)

Leaving aside the many unclear elements in these goals, one must ask the following questions:

1) What workable model will bring an understanding of the most rapidly growing continent of the world without specific content on its situation?

2) Are the Spanish-speaking in the United States to retain their cultural traditions? Shall we encourage this pluralism? How can we decide upon this concept of cultural diversity without content on the lives of the Spanish-speaking?

3) How can we be sensitive to the most extraordinary urban movement in the globe if we do not teach the content of urbanization in the lands south of the Rio Grande?

Our overriding concern is learning. Learning is achieved through clear goals which involve the ultimate perception of concepts, generalizations and models but none of these can be achieved without content which leads to

cognitive and affective learning. The key to the process is the selection and use of content. A homely example will demonstrate this. A new book by John Jerome, The Death of the Automobile, promises to become a best-seller. Shades of Henry Ford! The automobile is a harmless instrument in itself. It is the mindless, myopic uses to which we have put the automobile in the last fifty years which now make it appear a kind of monster. In our use of content in Social Studies, we may stimulate or stifle learning. We may bore students or rouse them to move toward goals both pupils and teachers accept. Let us use content with greater sensitivity than we have used the automobile.

(1) Krug, Mark, History and the Social Sciences, p. vii

(2) Kellum, D.F., The Social Studies, Myths and Realities, p. 60

(3) Ibid. p. 73

(4) Bruner, Jerome, "Man: a Course of Study", E.S.I. Quarterly Review, Summer 1965 p.93